

(Editor's note: The following statement about the why and wherefore of WORMWOOD has appeared in several forms over the years. This version of 1991, modified slightly, is the latest incarnation.)

THE WORMWOOD REVIEW

After 124 issues without significant debt or subsidy, it is difficult to deny that the longevity of the WORMWOOD REVIEW is due to a small but appreciative audience of subscribers who actually read the magazine. This makes it a small winner in a crowded field often marred by unreadable mags and literary politics. While the mag is closely identified with its editor, Marvin Malone, it is not widely known that he cannot be credited with founding the publication.

The first issue of the WORMWOOD REVIEW was printed in the fall of 1959 in Mt. Hope, Connecticut, and was edited by Alexander (Sandy) Taylor, James Scully, and Morton Felix. Taylor, who taught English at the nearby Storrs High School, owned an antique letterpress and had the connections to get quality paper wholesale. Scully and Felix were graduate students at the University of Connecticut at Storrs. The press was housed in a barn on Wormwood Hill. Its electric motor was defunct, so it had to be operated by spinning the flywheel by hand. To print, considerable physical effort was needed along with expert timing. The barn was drafty and the weather cold, so the editors/publishers/printers of the first issue had to be fueled with generous amounts of gin. The gin may explain the crooked placement of the text in many copies. Nevertheless, the first issue carried a number of name poets (Edwin Broch, John Holmes, Jean Garrigue, James Dickey, e. e. cummings, James Wright, Robert Sward, etc.), got good reviews, and pleased a good number of university accession librarians.

An encouraging number of subscriptions were received, and since the physical aspects of publishing did not appeal to the founding editors, these subscription monies were used to print the second issue commercially. This promptly used up the available cash and created an \$80 debt. Since subscriptions did not continue to arrive in amounts sufficient to publish a third issue, the mag died, as all good little mags are supposed to do.

In September 1960, Malone, a collector of little magazines, arrived in Storrs from New Mexico, where he had pub-

lished five mimeographed booklets of poetry. He discovered a begrimed copy of the second issue on the newsstand of the local drugstore, liked it, and soon teamed up with Taylor and Robert DeVoe, a high-school art teacher, to print a third issue. Since it was commercially printed by offset, the debt increased to \$265 after the bills were paid. DeVoe dropped out when Taylor and Malone printed issue 4 on the Wormwood Hill letterpress, using the same techniques as the founding editors. This completed the first volume.

Librarians and individual subscribers were pleased to have four issues in hand and placed renewals. It seemed possible to do a second volume, if costs could be reduced significantly. To do this, paper-plate offset printing was instituted using a small press loaned to the editors by a local minister. While the physical appearance of the mag suffered, it then became possible to pay off the existing debt and current bills and become financially independent.

With issue 5, other responsibilities took Taylor away from direct participation and Malone assumed all responsibilities. One should note here that Taylor is currently the director of the widely respected Curbstone Press of Willimantic, Connecticut.

For issue 9, the Malone Manifesto was mimeographed and stapled into the mag as a centerfold supplement. This irreverent editorial manifesto originally appeared in the November/December 1962 issue of MAINSTREAM as part of the symposium "Little Magazines in America," edited by Walter Lowenfels. Very few changes in editorial attitude have occurred since that time if one compares Malone's 13-point manifesto with his 10-point philosophical statement in the 1991 POET'S MARKET. Since the 1991 "ten commandments" are sincere statements and have somehow allowed the mag to survive 124 issues to date, it is probably worthwhile to repeat them here: (i) avoid publishing oneself and personal friends; (ii) avoid being a "local" magazine and strive for a national and international audience; (iii) seek unknown talents rather than establishment or fashionable authors; (iv) encourage originality by working with and promoting authors capable of extending the existing patterns of Amerenglish literature; (v) avoid all cults and allegiances and the you-scratch-my-back-and-I'll-scratch-yours approach to publishing; (vi) accept the fact that magazine content is more important than format in the long run; (vii) presume a literate audience and try to edit the mag so that it is readable from the

first page to the last; (viii) restrict the number of pages to no more than 40 per issue, since only the insensitive and the masochistic can handle more pages at one sitting; (ix) pay bills on time and don't expect special favors in honor of the muse; and, last and most important, (x) don't become too serious and righteous. Ignoring the above ten commandments appears to lay the ground for a mag's self-destruction. Very few little mags are terminated by outside forces—they self-destruct!

With issue 11, the sheets and cover were commercially offset-printed by Bill Dalzell at a pro-anarchist press in New York City, with the sheets collated and stapled by hand by Malone in Connecticut. With issue 27–28, a model D IBM electric typewriter with Bookface/Academic type was acquired, and the pages became much more clear and readable. The magazine at that point physically looked much like a 1991 issue.

With issue 35 and the move to Stockton, California, sufficient subscribers had been accumulated so that the entire printing job could be commercially produced from editor-prepared photo-ready copy. Beyond the printing, the mag is essentially a one-man operation (mail handling, manuscript reading, all correspondence, typing photo-ready copy, executing artwork and cover design, maintenance of subscription lists, serving as business manager/accountant, etc.), with the one man taking no salary. Very few items written by the editor have appeared in the review, and all of those have been short and written on the spot to fill a blank space when photo-ready copy was being prepared—all appear under one of several assumed names. Costs are met on schedule but there is no profit. If a slight profit shows, more pages are added or some special production is planned.

Cid Corman once indicated in a letter that he thought it useful to have each issue of ORIGIN associated in the public's mind with one poet, so that readers spoke of the new "Charles Olson" issue or the "Creeley." This concept appealed and so, with issue 11, a special center section devoted to one poet was tried (Carl Larsen's *THE STAINLESS STEEL INCUBUS*). This soon became a regular feature of the mag. Starting with issue 15, a certain number of copies were signed by the special-section poet, with half being retained by the poet and the remainder distributed to patron subscribers. The number of copies thus signed has ranged from 5 (WR 15, William Wantling) to 75 (WR 110–111, Charles Bukowski). These signed copies have rapidly appreciated in value—e.g., copies of WR 16 (Charles Bukowski, 24 signed copies) have sold for \$150 on the rare-book market. This has

encouraged patron subscriptions to the point where a limit has been placed of no more than 26 patron subscribers. There is always a waiting list.

In order to provide a better showcase for individual poets, a yearly chapbook program was started in 1975 with the chapbook counting as a single issue of the magazine. Because of the extra work involved, these chapbooks were designated in 1987 as double issues, and the page count of the regular issues (normally 36–40 pages) was boosted to 48 pages each so that subscribers would not be short-changed. This is a clear violation of the eighth of Malone's "ten commandments." For those interested in symbolism, this violation may herald the decline and fall of the WORMWOOD REVIEW.

THE EDITOR

Obvious

on my desk there is
this box of
non-paper-weights—

smooth palm-fitting
stones—

each one black-on-white
clearly numbered.

Sorting out the last
of the manuscripts
they are perhaps

my only defense.